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SUBJECT: MUNICH CONSULAR LEADERSHIP DAY AT INFINEON

REF: (07) STATE 152284

¶1. Summary. The themes of Munich's 2008 Consular Leadership Day were the CA Leadership Tenets "Learn Constantly" and "Build Great Teams." On January 30 we traveled together to Regensburg, about 90 minutes from Munich, where the German semiconductor company Infineon manufactures the electronic chips used in U.S. passports. In addition to touring the factory and watching the chips being processed and inserted into the blue U.S. passport covers, the regional newspaper interviewed and photographed the consular chief to produce an article highlighting the themes of travel security and German-American business ties. Munich's consular team is stronger and better-informed as a result of this year's Consular Leadership Day. End Summary.

¶2. Munich is the headquarters of Infineon (motto: "Never Stop Thinking"), a German company in the semiconductor and security industry which has the sole source contract for the manufacture of electronic chips in U.S. passports. The chips are processed in Regensburg, a city about 90 minutes from Munich. Infineon was delighted to organize a visit for our consular section and rolled out the red carpet for us. We traveled together by van to Regensburg, and our program began with a presentation and briefing by Infineon executives on the development of chip technology and applications in their many projects producing secure travel documents in Europe and North America. In addition to electronic passports they produce electronic national ID cards, credit and debit cards with chips and are developing electronic drivers licenses and European health cards.

¶3. After the overview the consular section staff changed into protective clothing and caps for our tour of the sterile environment of the chip production assembly line. We saw chips being sliced, diced, ground, "bumped," and checked for quality and uniformity. We saw how chips were removed from their round wafers onto long strips and finally from the strips into passport backing. The highlight was to watch our blue U.S. passport covers move along the assembly line, be fitted with chips and then loaded into boxes for shipment to the GPO where the gold lettering on the front would be added and the paper pages inserted. We all appreciated the irony of the fact that some of the passport books would eventually return to Germany from NPC in the form of individual passport documents.

¶4. After the briefing and tour, we posed for a group photo and the consular chief was interviewed by the regional newspaper about our visit. Our day-long field trip was informative and enjoyable. Staff appreciated the insight into the private sector and the high tech world of chip technology which we see every day in the form of our new electronic U.S. passports. Fostering a sense of pride in our work, we received an insider's view of the future of secure travel documents. In addition, our escape from the routine of the office was a valuable opportunity to get to know one another better and to build a stronger consular team.

Nelson